Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

and set by arbitrary standards. A first grade pearl should have a perfect "skin," i.e., be free from flaws and specks, and should have a fine "orient," that is, a delicate texture of translucent pink or cream color with an irridescent luster. It is difficult to say whether the size, shape, or color of a pearl is the more important. Other qualities being equal, a perfectly symmetrical pearl is more desirable than a pear-shaped or a flat one. There are pearls of all colors —white, black, gray, green, yellow, gold, and pink. The size of the pearl is important only in combination with a desirable color and shape. Luster is probably the most important characteristic of a first-class pearl; other qualities can be more or less lacking if the pearl has good luster or depth. The most perfect pearl in existence is said to be one in the Zosima Museum in Moscow, known as "La Pellegrina," weighing 28 carats. The largest known pearl is an irregularly shaped one in the Victoria and Albert Museum, having a circumference of 4.5 inches.

The value of a really rare pearl increases by leaps and bounds from purchaser to purchaser. A single example is a Persian Gulf pearl purchased by Barbara Hutton for $75,000; the pearl originally sold for $30,000. It is not necessarily on the spot where the pearl is produced that it is most cheaply procured, and if procured, of the finest quality. Arabs in the Persian Gulf know that the Best Gulf pearls may be purchased most cheaply in India. Peddlers may be found in most towns on the Persian Gulf with necklaces of Gulf pearls for sale; however, these have usually been imported from Bombay.

VALUE OF PERSIAN GULF PEARLS

The annual value of the Persian Gulf pearl fisheries is difficult to estimate exactly, as there are no published figures and the season's crop is not shipped out through any single port. Figures published by some authors are actually only the value of the pearls passing through Bahrein Island. However, as close to 90 percent of the Gulf pearls do pass through Bahrein, these figures give a rough estimate. The earliest figure known dates back to the early 19th century; Wilson stated in 1833 that the value of the pearls produced at Bahrein amounted to from £200,000 to £240,000, while the value of the whole fisheries was about

1: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

£300,000.[1] Wellsted stated that in 1835 the total value was £400,000.[2] Zwemer stated that the value of pearls shipped from Bahrein in 1896 was £303,941.[3]

Cox gives the value of pearls exported in 1925 as £220,000 from Bahrein and £9,000 from Lingeh in Iran, and for 1926 as £192,000 from Bahrein, £11,000 from Kuwait, and £5,200 from Lingeh (a total of about £208,000 for 1926); Cox further states that the true value was probably ten times these figures, for reasons he fails to clarify.[4] However, Thornburg has accepted this last statement of Cox's as a fact and has arrived at a figure of $10 million for the value of the Bahrein fisheries in 1926,[5] a figure that is unreasonably high. Thornburg estimates that in the years immediately following World War II the value of the Bahrein pearl fisheries was about $250,000; Kruegar states that in 1949 the value of the Bahrein pearl fisheries amounted to $200,000.[6] Rihani gives figures for the whole Gulf which amount to about $15 million,[7] the most absurd value published.

A summary of the more reliable figures would seem to be as follows:

1830's	$1,500,000
1835	2,000,000
1896	1,500,000
1925	1,200,000
1926	1,000,000
1946	250,000
1949	200,000

As can be seen from the above table, the value of the fisheries dropped to only a fraction of its previous value after the world depression of the thirties. It should also be pointed out that due to world inflation the figure of $200,000 for 1949 represents less than $100,000 on 1926 monetary standards. However, while the depression dealt the Gulf pearl fisheries a devastating blow, its

[1] D. Wilson, "Memorandum Respecting the Pearl Fisheries in the Persian Gulf," *Geographical Journal*, III (1883), p. 284.
[2] James R. Wellsted, *Travels in Arabia* (London, 1838), p. 264.
[3] Samuel M. Zwemer, *Cradle of Islam* (New York, 1900), p. 100.
[4] Percy Z. Cox, "Persian Gulf," *Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago, 1946), vol. 17, p. 605.
[5] Max Thornburg, "Bahrein," *Encyclopedia Americana* (New York, 1949), vol. 3, p. 482.
[6] H. C. Kruegar, "Bahrein," *Collier's Encyclopedia*, II (New York, 1949), p. 668.
[7] Ameen Rihani, *Around the Coasts of Arabia* (London, 1930), p. 275.

1: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

continued decline cannot be laid at its door. Japanese cultured pearls first started to appear on the market in quantities in the twenties just before the depression. As time has gone on the competition they offered has tended to become less and less, but on the other hand, the world demand for this gem has reached an all-time low, mainly because of the effect of the cultured pearl.

The introduction of cultured pearls and artificial pearls alike has had far-reaching effects on the natural pearl market. While they do not compete insofar as price is concerned when they are recognized as cultured, it takes an expert to distinguish them. Thus, the net effect of cultured pearls, and even more so of the expertly fabricated synthetic pearls, has been to cheapen the pearl as a precious gem in the eyes of those who wear them. There are actually some women who prefer cultured pearls, which are usually more uniform. As a result, natural Gulf pearls do not bring a tenth of what they did a quarter of a century ago at Bahrein.[8]

It is a strange fact that even though a cultured pearl is worth only a few percent of the value of real pearls, there are few pearl merchants in the Persian Gulf who can tell a good cultured pearl from the Gulf pearl without destroying the two in the effort.[8] Radiography (x-ray), x-ray diffraction, fluorescence under x-ray radiation, or specific gravity determinations, alone or in various combinations, may be used to detect cultured pearls, but these physical tests are not used by the Arabs for obvious reasons.

One might ask why cultured pearls have not been "introduced" into the Persian Gulf pearl market by divers, captains, or merchants. The Arab will tell you that this is improbable. The importation of cultured pearls into the Persian Gulf is prohibited, and in fact carries a severe penalty. The oysters are opened in sight of the divers, so they all know how many exceptional pearls the *nakhoda* (captain) receives and thus what exceptional pearls

[8] One of the world's leading authorities on the differentiation of cultured and natural pearls by their physical properties, Dr. A. E. Alexander, visited the Persian Gulf in 1947 to study the pearl fisheries and took with him a number of fine cultured pearls which he showed to a group of about thirty Bahrein pearl dealers. These Arabs had never seen a cultured pearl, whose importation is normally prohibited, and were astounded at its quality.

1: Bowen C-4 (1945-1947) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

the dhows leave the banks. These men wander through the fleet in their own boats (usually launches) always trying to get to a first quality pearl before the other brokers hear of it, and always hoping that the *nakhoda* will not recognize its value. The broker's paraphenalia consists of a magnifying glass, a small hand balance, weights, and a set of brass screens for grading the pearls. When pearls are sold on the banks they are ceremoniously transferred from the captain's red bunting to the broker's.

Regardless of where they are sold, the majority of the pearls go to Bombay, and from Bombay eventually to Paris, the world's pearl emporium. Pearls are usually shipped to Bombay by air. The reason is simple: Usury and insurance are prohibited by the Quran. If the pearls were shipped to India by Arab dhow or steamer through an Arab agent, there could be no insurance on the consignment. However, if the pearls are shipped via Trans World Airline or British Overseas Airlines Corporation, the pearls can be heavily insured. Thus, the Arabs use a Western agency to get around the Quranic prohibition. In Bombay, Indian workers skillfully pierce the pearls with fine bow-driven drills and string them on silk, graded according to color and size. The pearls are sold to European dealers in bunches consisting of a number of strings and generally known as "Bombay bunches."

When the season has ended and the pearls are sold, the captain deducts the cost of the food and provisions. What is left represents the profit. Of this the owner of the dhow gets one-half; of the remainder each diver and each attendant gets one share and the captain two. Most of the dhows leaving Saudi Arabian ports are small (not over 40 feet) with small crews—usually something like 6 divers, 4 attendants, and a captain. Thus, each diver and attendant would get one twenty-fourth (about 4 percent) of the profits, and the captain would get one twelfth (about 8 percent). The pearling dhows operating out of Bahrein and Kuwait are generally much larger than the Saudi Arabian dhows, and may have crews of 40 or more. The profits of these craft are split in much the same way as the profits on smaller dhows, but the captain gets more shares with these larger crews than he does with the smaller.

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MK1

SOME ASPECTS OF THE ARAB DHOW TRADE

Alan Villiers

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AT THE end of 1939, there were 106 large ocean-going dhows on the registry of the Persian Gulf port of Kuwait. They averaged about 100 tons, the largest being 300 and the smallest about 75 tons, by European standards. Their average value, at that time, was perhaps 10,000 rupees, the approximate equivalent of $3,000. They made trading voyages with Iraqi dates, loaded in the Basra river, to the coasts of India and East Africa, generally making either two Indian, or one East African, voyage annually. The majority were in the trade to India, with an occasional diversion to East Africa. From India they were accustomed to bring back shipbuilding materials, coir for cordage, and Malabar teak; from East Africa they brought mangrove poles from either the delta of the Rufiji River, in Tanganyika, or from the port of Lamu, in Kenya Colony. These poles were used for building, and the dimensions of the rooms in most of the Kuwait houses depended upon the length of the mangrove poles brought from East Africa.

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In addition to these deep-sea dhows, there were also, at that time, between 100 and 150 pearlers, and some 50 or 60 smaller dhows in the local trade to the Basra river, many of them engaged in bringing fresh water (for Kuwait has no satisfactory supply of its own). New vessels were building at the rate of two or three a month, for deep-sea, and a similar number for coastwise trade.

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The port of Kuwait was then, and is still, the principal dhow-

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† ALAN VILLIERS, deep-sea sailor and author, spent over twelve months in 1938–39 studying firsthand the Arab dhow trade of the Persian Gulf and the coasts of southern Arabia and East Africa. His experiences are described in his *Sons of Sinbad*, published in 1940; Mr. Villiers here presents further information on the social and economic aspects of the trade.

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

building and trading port of the Persian Gulf, though offering little trade itself. Its only real rival in the deep-sea trade was the ancient port of Sur, near Ras al-Hadd, on the Gulf of Oman. Figures for the port of Sur were unobtainable, but there must have been at least 100 deep-sea dhows sailing from there, the majority to Mogadishu, Mombasa, and Zanzibar. Several ports on the Trucial Coast of Oman also sent their quota of deep-sea ships to Africa and India; and Muscat and Mutrah Bay, and the ports of Lingeh and Qishm, in Iran, contributed a few. But the flag of Iran was a rarity in both Indian and African ports, compared with the Arab.

In addition to the Persian Gulf and Omani ports, Mukalla in the Hadhramaut, Ma'alla by Aden, Hodeida, Mocha, and Luhaiya in the Yemen, and Qizan on the coast of Asir in the Red Sea, all build and maintain considerable fleets of dhows. These I have seen, personally; there are many ports I was unable to visit. It is probable that the dhow trade round the Arab coasts employs upwards of 2,000 vessels of one sort or another, in which at least thirty or forty thousand men gain some sort of livelihood.

For many years, steamers of the British India Company have been trading in the Persian Gulf. Kuwait is still well served by steamers from Karachi, and an occasional long-voyage vessel used to put in from New York and London, even before the oil resources began to be exploited in 1940. American, German, Italian, and British lines, none of them likely to overlook any cargoes, all traded to the Gulf. The African East Coast and the Indian coasts are even better served. How is it, then, that a dhow trade of such importance still survives? How is it organized, and how managed?

One reason — perhaps the chief — why the ancient trade with the monsoons down the Indian Ocean not only survives but flourishes is that the dhows warehouse the goods they carry as well as transport them, and it suits the merchants better to have 10,000 packages of new season's dates divided among a fleet of dhows, than in the hold of one steamer which will unload the lot in a day or two, and flood the market. Ten thousand packages provide cargoes for at least five large dhows; the dhow master does not care how long he takes to discharge his cargo, for his overheads are trifling, his crew works on shares and handles all cargo, and

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

his vessel pays practically no port dues. His dates can therefore be warehoused in the dhow, until the market can easily absorb them.

The dhow trade is "native" trade, a stubborn plant which has been growing a long, long time. Nearly all the cargoes carried in dhows are for the native bazaars, and almost never for European account. Much of the cargoes consists of goods which the dhow captain himself, or some merchant or merchants travelling with him, sells for his own profit. The dhow is a peddler, as well as a carrier; a storehouse, as well as a ship; a means of livelihood to travelling merchants, as well as to her crew proper. Basra dates, though the most important outward cargo,[1] are only one source of revenue: there are a host of others, not necessarily always legitimate.

Kuwaiti owners of date plantations on the nearby Basra river play a considerable part in the financing of deep-sea dhows, though in most cases the captains, called *nakhodas*, are at least the nominal owners. It suits the merchants well that the *nakhodas* should regard themselves as the owners, for this provides them with a cheap form of insurance. If the dhow be lost it is the *nakhoda's* loss, and not the merchant's, for the poor captain must pay back not only the value of the dhow but the advance of freight given him to finance his voyage. Since Islam forbids all forms of ordinary insurance, this arrangement is to the merchant's liking. The *nakhodas* must accept it, for in most cases there is no other way by which they can acquire a big dhow.

In Kuwait, immediately prior to the outbreak of World War II, there was beginning to be some restiveness about this, and an association of the *nakhodas* had the temerity to issue its demands upon the merchants. These included payment of demurrage when unduly delayed at the loading berths in Basra (a dhow might be kept for weeks waiting for her cargo), a sliding scale of freights for different ports instead of the customary flat rate of 1.5 or 2 rupees a package regardless of destination, liability for the return of advances to cease with the loss of the ship, two competent officers for every seagoing dhow, and so forth. The demands represente

[1] Crew requirements and the very measurements of the dhows themselves are reckoned in terms of dates. A sailor to each 100 packages is the general rule, in Kuwait, and a dhow is spoken of there as having a capacity for 2,000 packages of dates, rather than as being of 100 tons burden.

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a bare minimun, surely, and no more than a nakhoda's right, but the merchants' answer was that if the nakhodas could make new rules, so also could they; and they had the real power. I do not think the attempt of the nakhodas got them very far.

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While the dates are generally carried both to India and East Africa on a freight basis, nearly all other cargo is bought to the ship's own account and peddled to best advantage. The merchants have a substantial share in the dhow's earnings, apart from the sailor's own ventures, which are limited to what they can stow in a sea chest on the poop. As far as I was able to discover -- and I was more than twelve months sailing in deep-sea dhows -- the freight from the dates, on the typical African voyage, is used to finance a cargo of salt from Aden and to purchase odds and ends which might earn a profit in the bazaars of the Benadir coast and Kenya Colony. At the same time, the dhow carries all the passengers she can prevail upon to make a voyage, anywhere, for the Arab of Oman, and the Hadhramaut in particular, is an inveterate wanderer, and every dhow is a passenger vessel by the mere possession of deck enough to lie upon.

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The salt is sold in the best market that offers between the Hadhramaut coast and Zanzibar. At the same time, the nakhoda does what trading he can in anything which he knows, from past experience, will command a market. The average dhow never leaves the Gulf without at least some carpets, allegedly Persian but generally of either Italian or English origin, which are used both as trade and as bribes. Cooking stones, ghee, live sheep, cows, sacks of rice and flour, dried fish, haberdashery of all sorts, brassware, cheap enamelware, Arab confectionery -- all these may be aboard, either as ship's ventures or as the crew's, generally the latter.

Every man of the crew concentrates on goods which can be bought cheaply in the free port of Aden, adulterated if possible in transit, and sold to the Somali or Swahili shopkeepers whose little stores abound in every port along the coast of East Africa, from Haifun in the north (which the Italians called Dante) to Mikindani in the south, which is about as far south as the Arabs sail in these days. Only Indian dhows go further, to Madagascar and the Comorin Islands. Gaily coloured turbans of the correct style

2 Villiers · T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

443 505 439 (for the manner of headdress worn in the different parts of Arabia and East Africa varies considerably; what will sell well at Mukalla, for instance, will find no buyers at Kuwait; and the Arab is a stickler for style), sarongs from Java and Japan, amber and artificial beads of the kind the true Moslem loves to fondle, cigarettes in gay packages but of no advertised brand, cheap perfumes (which I have several times seen the sailors laboriously adulterating with water from the ship's tanks), small crocheted caps to go under turbans, money belts, caps of artificial leather and pullovers of extremely artificial wool, veils for the harem, basketware from the Hadhramaut, sometimes a little hashish or *qat*[1] — these are the sailors' ventures, and the profits are their own.

The sailors are inveterate smugglers; almost none of the goods they bring — apart from the main cargo — is declared. Since they leave from small ports along the coast of Arabia where official supervision, while thorough, is not organized to conform with the Europeans' idea of how trade should be conducted, and since so much of their more highly dutiable goods are private ventures, such manifests as they produce to the authorities are useless. The mariner buys his goods himself, and sells them himself (though he does not mind disposing of them to boats alongside). He sees no point in accepting any official interference, and to him the European on the East African coast is still an interloper, recently arrived and wholly unnecessary.

508 484 486 The passenger trade is an important one, particularly in the East African voyaging. Though the Italians in their colonies tried to regulate the movement of Arabs, and the growth of Indian influence in Mombasa and Zanzibar has much lessened Arab trade and opportunities, still thousands of Omani and Hadhramaut Arabs travel down the Benadir coast and to Zanzibar annually. Every dhow fit to go to sea — and quite a few which look as if they are not — carries her quota, and some of the overcrowding is incredible. Among 35 Arab dhows which were lying together at Mogadishu, in Italian Somaliland, in the season of 1939, the Italian immigration authorities checked 4,000 passengers. They

[1] A bush common to southern Arabia, especially the Yemen. The leaves, when chewed, are somewhat intoxicating.

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

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also a pearl diver. Pearling from Kuwait and Bahrein is carried on during the season of the hard southwest monsoon in the Indian Ocean, when the big dhows are laid up and there is no ocean sailing. It is therefore possible for the same men to carry on both callings, though in these days the seaman is becoming a little too enlightened to go off cheerfully to the purgatory of pearling.

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The seaman is also helped by his religion, by his interest in the seafaring life (which has a great appeal of its own) and the fine camaraderie about it, and in many cases by the delights of night life in such ports as Zanzibar and Bombay. If he has no harem of his own back in Kuwait, he is certainly no celibate at Zanzibar. He generally seems to manage a small home in Kuwait after a few voyages, depending upon his own business acumen and the general success of the dhow he serves in. Many *nakhodas* appear to maintain several.

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In addition to the merchants, *nakhodas*, and seamen, there is another class of importance in the dhow trade. These are the mates, the experienced officers who, never able to become *nakhodas* themselves because of an unacceptable financial status, very often have more to do with the actual sailing of the dhow than the *nakhoda*. Each big dhow carries at least one such experienced man. Sometimes he is of Iranian origin, and has been sailing since he could walk. Sometimes he is a Negro, member of a trusted ex-slave family, who lives with the *nakhoda* at home or has been brought up in his courtyard.

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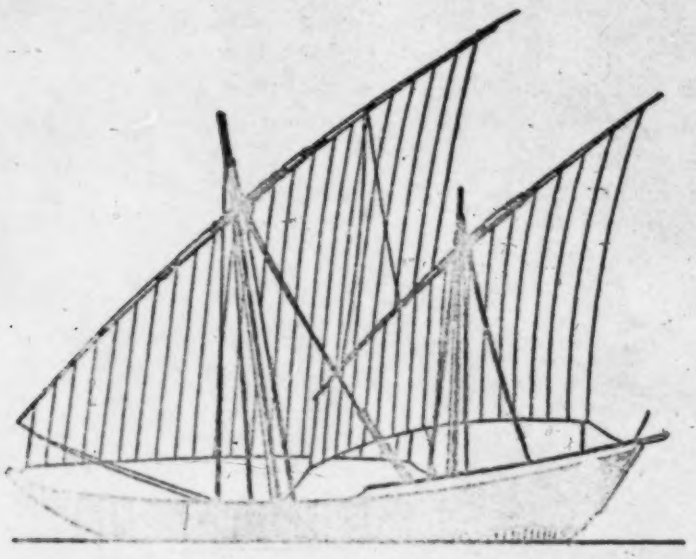
He is always an able mariner, but he is not often trusted to trade. It is not at all uncommon for a *nakhoda*, on the usual East African voyage — which always begins with a long haul and long-winded peddling of dates round the coasts of Southern Arabia, and to Berbera and perhaps Djibouti — to leave the ship for considerable portions of the passage at sea, while he looks after her business interests ashore. For example, in one Kuwait dhow in which I had the good fortune to sail for some eight months, the *nakhoda* cheerfully left the ship at Aden and went on to Mukalla by steamer, to steal a march on the other shipmasters and scoop the cream — he hoped — from the passenger market. Again, he left the ship at Zanzibar, and his mate took her down to the delta of the Rufiji, hauled her out on the beach at Kwale Island south

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arab: MK2

of Dar es Salaam, loaded her with mangrove poles, and brought her back to Zanzibar again, where the *nakhoda* had ostensibly been trying to assemble passengers and extra cargo for the return to Arabia but in fact had been enjoying a new harem.

Mates are paid by shares, and are, in my opinion, an oppressed class. They carry their own ventures, engage in smuggling on a



Baggala

small scale — haberdashery, currency, and so forth — and generally keep the ship's books. They may become *nakhodas* of small *booms*, running to the Basra river; but it is unusual for a man from the more dignified deep-sea trades to descend to this. There is no social status about the *nakhoda* of a coastwise water dhow.

Ships are built by shipwrights who employ no naval architects. Both builders and riggers' lofts are unknown. The ships are put together entirely by eye and take the traditional form either of the double-ended *boom*, or the carved and embellished *baggala*, which obviously has a considerable ancestry from the Portuguese

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
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galleon. *Baggalas*, being both costly to build and unwieldy in a seaway, are now unfashionable. A *boom* is both cheaper and much easier to build, and carries just as much. Her sharp stern makes her safer in a seaway, though it is no part of her builder's plan that her *nakhodas* will try her qualities in a storm. Their sailing, he hopes, will be confined to sunny seas and more or less favorable winds; therefore the clumsy lateen rig will do.

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The lateen is awkward but cheap; it demands a big crew, but these are cheap, too, for they are the sailmakers and riggers as well as mariners, and their only cost is an agreed share in the ship's earnings. The lateen is a grand pulling sail, and the dhows sail handsomely in their own conditions. There is nothing clumsy about them, though their fish-oiled hulls smell abominably and their underwater bodies are preserved by a mixture of tallow and lime, rubbed on by hand and renewed quarterly. The sailors do this work, as well as handle all the cargoes, keep the passengers in order and extol the merits of their ship so that more passengers might sail with her, tow the ship with her own longboat and propel the smaller dhows by sweeps, in calms, and fight for her if need be. The Kuwait dhows today are never armed, though the Suri may be.

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III

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A brief description of my personal experiences will serve to illustrate a typical East African voyage.[1] I sailed in a Kuwait dhow of the *boom* type, a vessel of 2,000 date-packages capacity — perhaps 150 tons — which had a crew of twenty-eight. She carried something between 120 and 180 passengers, although her hold was full of salt and rice, and her decks were already crowded with a large longboat, a small gig, and a dhow under construction for sale at Lamu.

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I joined the vessel at Ma'alla, the native port of Aden. She had already been several months at sea, peddling a full cargo of dates from Fao (by the mouth of the Basra river) around the coast of the Hadhramaut, and to Berbera. When I joined her, she had been hauled out on the beach at Ma'alla and her bottom

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[1] The voyage here summarized is described in detail in the author's *Sons of Sinbad* (New York, 1940).

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MI1

repayed, and already was loaded with her cargo of salt and rice in sacks, and some mysterious parcels on deck for the Sultan of Mukalla. All her crew had their sea chests filled with trade goods from the cheap *suq* in the Crater at Aden; her carpenter was at work on a 40-foot dhow for sale on the voyage; and she had shipped several Suri and Omani merchants, from Aden, bound on a general trading voyage on their own account, wherever the dhow might take them.

We sailed first to Mukalla and Shihr, where we embarked passengers (the fare was eight rupees regardless of destination, the passengers providing their own food and looking after themselves entirely) and some further cargo. This consisted mainly of a parcel of condemned dates which it was hoped to sell to the Somali (or failing that, to feed to the Swahili labor in the Rufiji Delta, when loading mangrove poles), some dried shark which smelled high even aboard the dhow, some cooking stones, and a considerable quantity of basketware.

With this lot aboard, and the *nakhoda* pessimistic and depressed at the small number of passengers, though his dhow appeared crowded, we sailed first to Haifun, a salt port on the northeastern coast of Italian Somaliland. There we anchored among a fleet of dhows, and did nothing at all for some time. Finally, some rice was sold, some haberdashery smuggled into boats which the local Somali brought alongside, and lot of fish caught and dried. Then we went on to Mogadishu, running down the coast with the northeast monsoon. At Haifun another Kuwait ship was caught smuggling and heavily fined; and all the Kuwaiti in the harbour contributed to pay the fine. At Mogadishu, it was hoped to land a hundred or so passengers, but the Italians would not permit them to disembark. Trade there was extremely difficult, and little could be done. Some of the merchants left, as far as I could gather, to try to collect debts owing to them from previous voyages. Some smuggling went on (I saw a lovely carpet change hands), some of our passengers melted away and their places were taken by others, equally undocumented.

After a week or ten days we passed on down the coast to Lamu. Here more passengers landed and there was a determined attempt to sell the new dhow which the carpenter had completed. She

K was a lovely little vessel which could carry some fifteen tons. The
MA price asked was 1,000 East African shillings, or about $240. At that price,
501 there was no buyer; she finally changed hands at 700 shillings. Lamu was
439 a mangrove-pole port, but I gathered the trade was rather too well re-
435 gulated for our nakhoda's taste, and we bought nothing.

K Next came Mombasa, a port with a large dhow trade. Some figures I
MA saw in the Report of the General Manager on the Administration of the
439 Railways and Harbours (Kenya and Uganda) showed that the dhow trade
505 was increasing, rather than diminishing. The latest returns I say, for the year ended December 31, 1937, showed that 1,427 dhows had arrived at Mombasa, an increase of ten percent on the previous year. These 1,427 dhows were computed to register -- if they had been registered -- nearly 40,000 tons. Many were Swahili, from Lamu and Zanzibar, but a large proportion was Arab. There was a native harbor set aside for them, and here we sold salt, landing it in our own longboat.

K We got rid of our surviving passengers, gave feasts to merchants and
MA officials of the native harbor (these were a great feature of the voyage,
[574] and were always accompanied by much monotonous singing and dancing), gathered tidings from brother nakhodas from Kuwait and Sur about trade prospects further south, collected debts, and finally departed toward Zanzibar.

K There were three Indian and one Iranian deep-sea dhows in the port at
MA Mombasa. The Iranian was an enormous vessel of over 400 tons -- the
501 largest dhow I saw anywhere. She was a boom and had been built at
396 Kuwait, but the Kuwaiti sold her because they found such large vessels
439 uneconomic, in bad times, for the mere reason of their two great capacity. They brought too much to sell, when the market was depressed, and they could not wait indenfinitely to dispose of their cargoes because their overhead was too high, despite the fact that everything possible was done to keep down building costs, even to the sending of Kuwaiti shipwrights to the Malabar coast to build big vessels there, rather than carry the timber to Kuwait.

K Zanzibar, at that season of the year, was an even busier Arab
MA port than Mombasa. In the first month of the northeast season,
439 over a hundred ocean-going dhows had arrived at Zanzibar, most

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
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of them Arab. I noticed in the registry office of the Customs building that some were entered as Somali, and a few were registered in the Hadhramaut. No longer did they bring down picturesque cargoes of myrrh and frankincense (if they ever did) or ship out slaves and ivory, ambergris and hippopotamus teeth. They brought salt and dried fish; and when they came, the quantities of hashish and other drugs in the town showed a significant increase. They loaded little at Zanzibar for the homeward voyage, but went on down to the coast of Tanganyika.

We completed the discharge of our outward goods at Zanzibar, and the crew busied itself for weeks selling Hadhramaut basketware and Aden haberdashery — port of origin, Yokohama. When we sailed, leaving our *nakhoda* behind, our only cargo was the parcel of condemned dates, which the Somali would not have. We passed on down to the delta of the Rufiji River, a place given up to mosquitoes, malignant malaria fever, monkeys, sad Swahili, rain, and the best mangrove poles in the world. Here we lay six weeks, while a cargo of some 142 score of poles was laboriously cut and loaded. For this work, Swahili were engaged to help our crew, and at last the bad dates found consumers. The mangrove poles were ferried out in the dhow's longboat, and paid for in silver shillings to a white supervisor. There were some twenty dhows loading in the Rufiji delta at the time, all for the Persian Gulf.

MA [164]

It struck me as strange that the dhow should spend so much time embarking a cargo in which the total investment was less than $500, for no matter how I tried to figure things out, I did not see how it could possibly be worth her while to haul such a paltry cargo so long a distance, or how she could make enough from it to show a reasonable profit on the voyage. There was certainly something mysterious about this mangrove pole business, and the white supervisor, energetic as he was, by no means knew all that went on. I noticed later, when we sold our cargo to King Ibn Saud's agents at Bahrein for use in a new palace at Riyadh, that the Arab receipt was for 295 score, and the price paid, over 4,000 rupees, approximated $1,200.

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There was some attempt in Zanzibar to regulate the dhow traffic, and precautions were taken to see that there was no slaving, under any guise. A local act requires that evidence be shown

2: Villiers T-5 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2
Kuwait MK1
Zanzibar FM1

that any new crew members in Arab ships joined voluntarily; vessels must not be overmanned, and crew and passenger lists must be provided and in order; ships must be surveyed, and kept seaworthy; and *nakhodas* must be certificated. As for the last, the port officials conduct examinations, and the general principle seems to be that if a man is capable enough to bring a dhow down to Zanzibar, certificate or no certificate, he can also be trusted to sail her away again. But the fee for examination is fifteen shillings, and the Arabs complain about it.

We touched at Zanzibar again after loading in the Rufiji, reembarked our *nakhoda* and took aboard a few Swahili schoolteachers as passengers (they proposed to hire an automobile at Kuwait to take them to Mecca), filled the decks with coconuts and cases of soap and vermicelli, and departed toward the Persian Gulf again with the first of the broken weather at the end of the northeast season. We did not await the coming of the true southwest monsoons, for it sets in hard; we sailed direct to Muscat, in twenty-six days.

Muscat was depressed and there was no trade there, not even smuggling. All that changed hands, as far as I could see, was a box of Maria Theresa thalers, enormous Austrian coins minted in London for the Omani and available in Zanzibar at a price less than the exchange rate in Muscat. The Arabs turned everything to profit and were prepared to sell anything, even the ship. The sailors' pastime in the Rufiji was buying lemons — a thousand for a shilling — and converting them into sherbet, which they hawked in the *suq* at Kuwait throughout the summer.

Our cargo of mangrove poles sold at Bahrein, the ship returned to Kuwait, to lay up inside a coral breakwater until the new season's Iraqi dates ripened and it was time to go out again. At Kuwait, when all her people were returned — several relations of the *nakhoda* had dispersed from Zanzibar back to Lamu and Mogadishu to collect debts — a general balance sheet of the whole round voyage was struck, the profits computed carefully, and divided by a system of shares arranged traditionally. It was not a straightforward statement of income and expenditure; I never saw or heard of any piece of Arab seafaring business which was as simple as that. It was all complicated by prior advances,

2: Villiers T-8 (1938-39) 1948 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

debts, odd earnings not shared and even odder earnings which were shared, and mysterious complicated procedures, some of which I never did fathom, for the war came, and stopped my investigations.

The son of the merchant family which owned our dhow, however, told me that her gross profit on the nine-month round voyage was 11,000 rupees, not including the proceeds of the crews' and officers' private ventures. But I think he exaggerated, for the total investment in the dhow was little more than that. But at any rate, the dhow's people were well satisfied and they all, save one, went back to sea with her. The *nakhoda* grew fat throughout the summer, and took a new wife, and a new *boom* for his brother at a cost of 10,500 rupees; and I heard no complaints from the merchants.

As far as I was able to discover, half the gross earnings went to the ship; this was the merchant's share. The cost of the food for the round voyage (which was not much, for all hands lived very simply and fishing lines were the most important equipment in what passed for her storeroom) was deducted from the other half, and the remainder was then divided by shares arranged strictly in accordance with the accepted value of each man's rating aboard. The sailor's share on the voyage which I made was reported to be 135 rupees (about $40), whereof 35 rupees had been advanced. This was little enough for such a long voyage, and though they worked hard at all sorts of things and were ready for any kind of business, I doubt whether a sailor's earnings from other sources amounted to more than 20 or 30 rupees, clear.

I heard of dhows from Kuwait that season which were distributing less than 100 rupees; according to the Kuwaiti, who had no high opinion of them, the Suri rarely paid out more than fifty. To a sailor whose only home was the sand of the *suq* and his bed the cloak around him, whose wants were few and whose paradise was assured, even 50 rupees may be a vast sum of money. There was, at any rate, contentment throughout the Arab shipping industry as I knew it, and the quiet philosophy I learned among the simple seamen was of great help to me in the days of the long-drawn war which was soon to follow.

136 stinging tentacles that can easily put out an eye. There is also a needle urchin (*Diadema*), first reported from the Persian Gulf in 1949.[9] This urchin has spines more than a foot long, which can cause nasty, slow-healing wounds. However, as the urchin is several feet in diameter, black, and slow-moving, it is more easily avoided than the dawl.

164 752 Pearl divers suffer from a variety of diseases, most of which can be directly traced to their occupation. Open sores and skin ulcers result from encounters with the dawl and scrapes against coral and other sharp objects. Suppuration of the eardrums, rheumatism, and nosebleeds are common. Inflamed eyes are always a sign of the pearl diver. Persian Gulf divers are more susceptible to the "bends" than divers who use suits, since they must surface as rapidly as possible.

262 461 Divers never eat while they are working. When the day's diving is finished, the diver has some rice, dates, and tea, but not much else; sleep is his only energy builder. Every 10 days or so the divers get a rest, and every three weeks or so the dhows put in for food and water unless they have been revictualed at sea.

228 312 502 438 In recent years Ras Tanura has become a center of activity for the pearling fleet off its shores; for the oil company's installations can now pump an abundance of fresh water into the water tanks of the dhows much faster than it can be transferred by waterskins. The larger vessels anchor for the night on the banks; the smaller vessels sometimes take shelter if it is available. Some vessels of the pearling fleet replenish their water supply from the submarine springs that gush into the Persian Gulf in numerous places along the Arabian littoral. Relatively fresh water can be brought up in a waterskin by a diver. One of these springs, marked by a spar buoy, is to be found a few miles north of Jubail.

228 The first duty of the day on a pearling dhow is opening the previous day's oysters, which are heaped on deck in a large pile so that no one knows who found the oyster which may produce the rare gem. The muscles of the oysters relax enough overnight so that it is not difficult to open them. Less than a third of the oysters yield pearls, and these are usually only very small seed pearls.

228 442 439 Pearls are sometimes bought on the pearl banks by brokers who travel around in their own boats trying to get the best pearls before other brokers hear of them, and trying to get a valuable pearl before a nakhoda realizes its value. But whether the pearls are sold on the banks or at Bahrein, they all end up in Bombay.

113 [9] A. H. Clark and R. LeB. Bowen, Jr., Echinoderms of Tarut Bay and Vicinity, Saudi Arabia, *Amer. Museum Novitates*, No. 1390, 1949.

228 442 439 509 all end up in Bombay. The Indians drill, polish, and grade the pearls, and string them on silk; these short strands are known as "Bombay bunches." Before World War II the pearls were sent to India by streamer; today they are usually sent by air from Bahrein, Kuweit, Sharjah, and Dharan. The pearls are usually sold to Indian merchants in these towns, but occasionally the Arabs themselves take the pearls to Bombay.

228 465 After all the pearls have been sold, the nakhoda figures out the season's profit. The owner of the dhows gets half the profit; the other half is divided among the crew. Most of the pearling dhows out of Saudi Arabian ports are small (not more than 40 feet), with crews of ten -- six divers and four attendants -- in addition to the nakhoda. Each diver and each attendant gets one share in the profits (about 4 per cent); the nakhoda gets two shares, unless he owns the dhow and longboat, in which case, of course, he gets more than half the profit. The number of shares each of the crew, the nakhoda, and the owner get is agreed on at the beginning of the season and may vary from place to place. Many of the pearling dhows out of Kuweit and Bahrein are considerably larger than those out of the Saudi Arabian ports and may have crews of forty or more; on these the nakhoda gets a larger number of shares.

Pearling is a gamble for everyone concerned, from the merchants to the divers. Some seasons are good, some bad; sometimes a boat has bad luck, sometimes excellent luck. A share on a pearling dhow should be worth several hundred rupees, but it may not be worth fifty.

228 426 Usually a share on a pearling dhow represents a year's wages, since the pearling industry operates under the "debt system" mentioned above (not to be confused with the "truck system" of pearl fisheries elsewhere, in which the divers are paid off in produce). Under the debt system the divers and attendants are given cash advances during the winter season, when they are not working, and their families are given food and supplies while the season is on. The advances are deducted from their calculated shares, so that usually the worker gets little or nothing.

Thus the divers and attendants are perpetually in debt. Once a worker is in debt to a nakhoda, he cannot work for anyone else during the pearling season; this is one of the laws of the industry. He has virtually sold himself into economic slavery to the nakhoda, who has his services and never actually has to pay him anything, whereas he in effect pays the nakhoda in the pearls he produces. However, it should be remembered that the nakhoda is in turn usually in debt to some merchant, who commonly finances numerous nakhodas.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

228 361 505 However, a century before this, Kuwait was apparently noted more for its pearl fisheries (which are still important) than for its maritime trade, as Niebuhr related that in 1763

> Kuwait is a sea-port town. . . . The inhabitants live by the fishery of pearls and of fishes. They are said to employ in this species of naval industry more than 800 boats. In the favorable season of the year, this town is left almost desolate, everybody going out either to the fishing, or upon some trading adventure.[6]

In Niebuhr's time, in the eighteenth century, the Omani sailors from Muscat and Sur on the Gulf of Oman were the famed Arab mariners, for Niebuhr related that

> The inhabitants of Oman, although not fond of sea-fights, are nevertheless the best mariners in all Arabia. They have several good harbours, and employ many small vessels in the navigation between Jidda and Basra. To this last town there come annually fifty such vessels.[7]

In the middle of the last century Muscat was still an important maritime port, for in 1854 Osgood related that

> Several ports in the Persian Gulf are tributary to it, and some excellent ships and a large number of [*baghlas*] employed in coasting and foreign trade, are owned by the Banian merchants at Muscat. In fact more than half of the trade of the Persian Gulf is carried on in ships owned at Muscat. . . . The trade with America, which is carried on chiefly by vessels from Salem does not exceed thirty-five or forty thousand dollars annually. Dates and cash are usually taken in exchange for American merchandize.[8]

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In the present day Muscat has completely fallen from its former prized position and given way to Kuwait and Bahrein Island in the Persian Gulf. However, the port of Sur in Oman still carries on the maritime tradition of the Omanis and maintains a considerable fleet of dhows which have long been prominent in the trading along the African coast.

501 The craft that make the trip down the African coast from Arabia are by no means all large ocean-going vessels; craft of all sizes and descriptions come into Zanzibar. Villiers[9] tells of seeing a 30-foot *jalbhut* from Oman sailing down the African coast. Having owned and sailed a *jalbhut* of about the same size in the relatively calm Persian Gulf waters, I have nothing but the utmost respect for anyone with the nerve to sail such a small open boat several thousand miles in the potentially rougher Indian Ocean.

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[6] C. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), II, 127.
[7] Ibid., 122.
[8] Osgood, *Notes of Travel* (Salem, 1854), p. 81.
[9] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 190.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

waters from May to September, and why most local Indian craft are drawn up on the beaches.

II

Dates are probably as important a factor as the monsoons in maintaining the large lateen fleet in the waters of the Indian Ocean. By a lucky coincidence, the great date crop of Iraq begins to ripen just before the northeast monsoon sets in about October. The great maritime expansion of the port of Kuwait has probably been due in no small part to its proximity to Basra, the port through which most of Iraq's dates go.

Dhows come to Basra for dates from Kuwait, Bahrein, Persia, Oman, India, and even as far away as the Hadhramaut. Starting in the latter part of August and continuing into September, Kuwait deepwater ships are floated from the beaches, where they have rested for several months during the summer, making ready for the run to Basra to pick up dates. The farther the home port is from Basra, the earlier the ships must depart, so that craft from the Hadhramaut must allow a month or more to get to Basra, riding up to the Gulf of Oman on the summer monsoon and then working their way up the Persian Gulf, where the monsoon is not felt.

Almost without exception the date cargo is carried out of Basra on consignment for some merchant; sometimes the destination is known on leaving Basra, but often the consignment is sent to Aden or Mukalla (see Plate 23—bottom) in South Arabia for final shipping instructions from the Arab or Indian export firm shipping the dates. Dates are usually not carried into the Red Sea much past Hodeida in the Yemen in Kuwait ships, although Villiers[14] tells of a Kuwait *bhum* transporting a load of dates as far as Qizan in Saudi Arabia.

In such a manner dates have been leaving Iraq for decades bound for the southern shores—that is until the winter of 1949. In that winter, for the first time in many years, the great date-bearing Kuwait *bhum* fleet failed to appear in its usual strength in the waters along the southern shores of Arabia; only a portion of the usual quota appeared in Aden by the first of 1950. The dates that would ordinarily have come into Aden in Kuwait dhows came down unceremoniously under steam. What caused this abrupt change in the well-established status quo of the dhow trade? The same thing that has wrought so many other radical changes in the economy of the Middle East lately—oil!

Kuwait is actually a city-state with few industries except pearling, fishing, and shipbuilding; there are no farms, no date plantations, and only

[14] A. Villiers, *55*, p. 366.

361 a few scattered Bedouin tribes. The Kuwait Oil Company is now operating in high gear, and has apparently offered so many opportunities for natives that *nakhodas* (captains) have difficulty in getting men to sail their ships at the wages they can offer. Sailors never get any regular wages on a dhow, receiving a share of the earnings of the ship only after the voyage is over. Many sailors have apparently found that it is a comfortable feeling to receive a regular wage every week! It is too early yet to tell whether or not the change is permanent.

439 There has also been a noticeable fall-off in date-bearing Arab dhows sailing to India, but apparently for a different reason. Vaidya[18] states that during the 1943-1944 season, presumably for the first time, sixty to seventy per cent of the Arab fleet that usually brought dates failed to appear because of Arab restrictions on the export of wet dates and because of the high prevailing prices of the dates. Thus, this case is not allied to the present situation prevailing in Kuwait, as during the 1943-1944 season dates presumably were not shipped to India by any other means.

However, even if Kuwait is unable to put its *bhums* to sea, the date crop in the future will still probably be carried out of the Persian Gulf in dhows as usual; it will take time to attain a balance again. Whether the port of Sur rises to the challenge or whether some Persian port takes the trade remains to be seen. The Suris from Oman are logical successors to Kuwait, for in times past they have been noted for taking cargoes at lower rates than the Kuwaiti or any other mariners could afford to, and they have a long maritime history.

It is interesting to note that oil activities in other areas in the Persian Gulf have drastically affected the marine activities of other coastal towns. Over ten years ago, the Saudi Arabian ports of Jubail, Qatif, and Darin used to send out over a hundred dhows yearly to join the Persian Gulf pearl fisheries. Now if they send out several dozen dhows it is news; the Arabs who used to dive for pearls now have steady jobs with the Arabian American Oil Company. The same has happened on Bahrein Island. The Bahrein *nakhodas* are no longer able to find a multitude of divers who will accept the wage the *nakhodas* are able to offer; thus the Bahrein pearl fleet is only a shadow of what it was a quarter of a century ago.

439 Most but not all Arab dhows load dates first; however, many Omani 226 dhows bring cargoes of dried fish and fish oil, for fishing is particularly good in the waters off Oman, and sharks and large tuna are caught in considerable amounts, both for home consumption and export. Sometimes, however, the Omanis may set out for Africa empty, or with only a partial

[18] K. B. Vaidya, op. cit., p. 207.

cargo of fish if the local supply is not sufficient, and fish their way down the Arabian and African coast, selling fish wherever they can. Then they do the same thing on the way back. Mukalla is a favorite stopping place on the way down to Africa; I have seen dozens of *bedans* from Sur come into Mukalla and lay out their catch of shark or tuna on the beach to dry while they beached their dhows and put a coat of shark liver oil on their hulls (see Plate 18—top and bottom). Shark is a favorite Arab food; the flesh is cut off in strips or slabs and dried, while the liver is saved for its oil. The Arabs have little use for the tails or fins of the shark, but they are all meticulously saved and eventually find their way to China via India.

Thus these fish-bearing dhows from Oman start their trading venture from their home port, carrying a product of the port, and never carry other cargo; they trade fish from Sur to Zanzibar and back. For this trade they apparently always use the primitive *bedan*, usually ranging from fifty to sixty feet in length. The Suris export dates from Oman, or go to Basra for a cargo; when carrying dates they use large *sambuks* and *baghlas*.

In contrast to Arab and Persian ships which sail along the coasts the whole way, whether going to India or Africa, Indian vessels usually sail straight from India across the ocean for South Arabia or Africa with consignments of goods from Indian exporters at specific ports. Only rarely do they carry dates; their usual cargo consists of the products of India. From the Malabar coast they may carry coir rope stuffs, coir matting, teakwood, teak dugout canoes, coconuts, spices, cement, bricks, or tiles, while from Bombay they may pick up cotton piecegoods, groundnut oil, or tea. Most of the Indian ships that voyage to Arabia or Africa come from the Gulf of Cutch; few if any craft from Bombay or the Malabar coast carry this trade today.

In vivid contrast to the Arab date cargo and Indian cargo, which is usually on consignment, the replacement cargo for the rest of the voyage for the average Arab dhow is purchased by the *nakhoda* from the profit made on the date freight, for sale at the best market. After its date cargo has been discharged, the dhow becomes a trader in every connotation of the word, picking up and selling cargoes as she coasts south along the South Arabian and East African coast.

Sometimes the *nakhoda* may pick up a small cargo of partially spoiled dates to unload on the Africans; these the crew may wrap meticulously in fancy wrappers. At Aden the dhow may take on salt, sugar (from Java), rice (from Rangoon), canned goods, hardware, kerosene, or cotton goods and prints, and from the Hadhramaut coast the cargo may be dried shark

439 487 or other dried fish, *ghee* (clarified butter), honey, tobacco, grinding stones, and straw work (fans, mats, and baskets). It must be remembered that most of the cargo moving around the Middle Eastern waters in small vessels, whether dhows or small coastal steamers, is for the native trade and is destined for native bazaars, which are noted for the cheapness and poor quality of their wares. Once the dhow is loaded it is ready for the trip down the East African coast; however, the Arabs sometimes take a month or more to collect a full cargo.

Upon the *nakhoda* of the dhow rests the responsibility of getting another cargo for continuing down the African coast once the consigned date cargo is discharged. Invariably the *nakhoda* is the nominal owner of his dhow, so he acts as his own agent. As the cargo loaded after the dates are discharged is not on consignment, its selection is a matter of the *nakhoda's* judgment, with an eye to what will sell best in the African markets. However, a cargo that must be regarded as essentially on consignment is that of passengers. On some Africa-bound dhows passengers comprise a considerable portion of the cargo. The competition for passengers is very brisk, so that there is sometimes a race among the various *nakhodas,* who hasten to neighboring ports via motor launch as soon as their ships reach South Arabia to discharge their dates.

167 505 Through the dhows there is a constant flow of Arabs from South Arabia and Oman and of Indians from India. The immigrants usually become porters, hawkers, musicians, or beggars, but if they are very industrious, they may end up owning a small shop in the *suq*. Their usual aim in migrating is to work long enough so that they can go home after they save a little money; usually they never make enough to get out. Villiers[16] states that the Italian officials in Mogadiscio checked four thousand passengers on thirty-five dhows that were in the harbor when he was there in 1939. In 1937 the fare along the Hadhramaut coast between ports was three rupees.[17] In 1939 the fare from South Arabia to any African port was only eight rupees for men and twelve for women.[18] In Aden in 1950 the fare for natives traveling as deck passengers on A. Besse and Company dhows with no accommodations was 15 rupees to Berbera, Djibouti, and other ports about 150 miles from Aden; thirty rupees to Massaua, Mukalla, and ports about 450 miles away; and one hundred rupees to Jidda, Port Sudan, or ports approximately one thousand miles from Aden. These were fixed rates on the dhows operated by Besse; other dhows that

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[16] A. Villiers, 'The Arab Dhow Trade,' *Middle East Journal*, II (1948), 404.
[17] F. Stark, *A Winter in Arabia* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1940), p. 313.
[18] A. Villiers, *55*, p. 78.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

were trading down the coast could easily afford to undercut these rates. 167

As was mentioned above, women are usually charged higher rates for travel on dhows; this is because they have to be segregated and usually manage to make trouble, unintentional as it may be. Villiers[19] gives a graphic description of the nuisance a group of women can cause on an Arab dhow. For centuries women have apparently been creating disturbances on Arab dhows, for Niebuhr, who traveled down the Red Sea on a dhow in 1763, relates that

> In our passage, we found ourselves in danger of a worse misfortune than shipwreck. The females, who were lodged under us, more than once suffered linen, which they were drying, to catch fire, in consequence of which the vessel must have been burnt, if we had not been alarmed by their screams. . . . Those women were indeed extremely troublesome and indiscreet.[20]

Besides the ship's cargo, every member of the crew usually lays in a 439 store of goods that he personally peddles. Each sailor is allowed a sea chest 505 (see Plate 22—bottom), which he fills with print goods, turbans, flashlights, razors, sarongs, cigarettes, and perfumes which are later diluted. The *nakhoda* usually has some rugs or carved wooden chests to peddle (see Plate 17—bottom). Virtually none of this material enters Africa legally, but is for the most part smuggled in. Most of these trivial goods are carried in by the Arabs personally. Villiers[21] relates that he saw one man wear three gowns and eight sarongs, then wrap more sarongs around his knees, and make six trips through customs a day. Sometimes they are detected and stripped, but that is part of the risk. Often the Africans come out in canoes at night and remove the goods in small quantities. Frequently Arabs travel down the African coast on dhows as professional smugglers, living only for the smuggling they can accomplish. This sort of trading has been going on for centuries, for Paris[22] related that '. . . leur navires sont de vraies caravanes dans laquelles tous les matelots ont un intérêt.'

For the Arabs and the Persians, the trip down the African coast is leisurely and slow. It is not unusual for a dhow to stay in a port for three or four weeks haggling over a cargo, only to leave without having transacted any business. There is no rush, simply because there would be a long wait for the southwest monsoon to set in and carry them back north, if

[19] Ibid., p. 78 ff.

[20] C. Niebuhr, *Travels Through Arabia* (Edinburgh: R. Morison and Son, 1792), I, 219. 113

[21] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 143.

[22] F. E. Paris, *Essai sur la Construction Navale des Peuples Extra-Européns* (Paris, Bertrand, [1841]), p. 9. '. . . their ships are true caravans in which every sailor has an interest.'

439 505 they completed their trip down the African coast to Zanzibar too quickly.

Once the trading voyage down the African coast to Zanzibar is completed, Arab and Persian craft usually load a cargo of mangrove poles for shipment back to Arabia, unless they have the rare luck of getting cargo on northern consignment. For centuries mangrove poles from Africa have been used in the construction of houses in Arabia, where there is an extreme shortage of wood of any kind. Indian dhows never load mangrove poles since there is an abundance of wood in India. Mangrove trees are plentiful along the East African coast in swamps at certain river mouths; most poles come from the Rufiji Delta, a little south of Zanzibar, and from Lamu, north of Zanzibar. The poles are cut by the dhow crews, with the aid of Swahili cutters recruited for the purpose.

439 314 Alan Villiers[22] spent a month in the Rufiji Delta with a Kuwait crew obtaining a cargo of mangrove poles and has given us a most vivid description of pole-gathering activities. In the Rufiji Delta the mangrove trees grow in the soft, muddy delta, so that the cutters must wade in mud and water all day long. The branches are stripped with small axes and the poles loaded into small dugout canoes and brought to collection points where they are graded and stamped by government inspectors. Frequent and sometimes constant rain and savage mosquitos make a pole-gathering trip in the Rufiji Delta a suffering hell!

The Arabs have to pay the firm holding the pole-concession on the swamp for the poles, but in true Arab fashion they manage to load considerably more poles than they pay for. There is a well-organized pole-stealing racket, with everyone in on it, from the cutters to checkers and inspectors, with the exception of the head government forestry inspector. As the prevailing market price for mangrove poles in Arabia is about the same as the list price in Africa, the Arabs could not make any profit if they did not manage to load some extra poles.

439 In addition to mangrove poles, the Arabs may load cocoanuts, cloves, cocoanut oil, soap, or vermicelli. A private venture of the crew for the return trip from Zanzibar may be in lemons. Around Zanzibar lemons can be bought by the canoe-load for several rupees. The crew can squeeze the lemons and bottle the juice in bottles they have acquired along the way, using a pinch of salt as a preservative. The juice is sold at a nice profit in northern ports, where it is diluted for making sherbet.

In making the trip home on the southwest monsoon the Arabs waste little time, for the sooner they can get back, the more time they have for other activities before it is time to ship out again. Dhows from Oman

[22] A. Villiers, *SS*, pp. 257-261.

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK?

usually try to sell their mangrove poles along the South Arabian coast. If they do not sell their poles by the time they get to Oman, they simply put them on the beach and wait until next season. Knowing that the Omanis flood South Arabian ports with poles, the Bahreinis, Kuwaitis, and Persians sail straight for the Persian Gulf and its more profitable markets. Likewise, the Omanis, realizing that the Persian Gulf markets are flooded in the early summer, wait until late summer if they have to sell their poles in the Persian Gulf. Sometimes dhows from Oman carry firewood or fish oil in addition to mangrove poles if they go north to Basra for dates.

If a vessel sells its cargo of mangrove poles a considerable distance from her home port, it may load coral rock as ballast if it is available; this may be sold in Kuwait and ports in eastern Arabia. The coral rock is pried off the sea bottom and is a common commodity for construction purposes in a land where building rock is almost as scarce as wood on the sterile sandy coast.

As we have seen above, Persian and Arab ships make two trips to India during a season, usually carrying dates on consignment, but sometimes they carry dried fish, dried fruit, palm leaf mats, and coffee from the Persian Gulf and Arabia. After they have unloaded, they pick up a cargo of the products of India for sale in their native waters. These products consist mainly of teakwood timber, teak dugout canoes, coir roping stuff, coir matting, bamboo, cotton-goods, cocoanuts, chests, chairs, spices, and tea. Cement and tiles are occasionally loaded, but bricks (a very common product of the Malabar coast) are rarely loaded, as they are manufactured in Iraq and shipped out of Basra. Virtually all the teakwood for dhow construction comes from India, and Indian teak dugout canoes have been spread up and down the shores of the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf, and the Red Sea by dhows.

The *Periplus of the Erythraean Sea* tells of ships coasting on the African coast and trading cargoes as they went two thousand years ago. But cargoes have changed considerably from those ancient times when alabaster, myrrh, and frankincense were exported from South Arabia and tortoise shell, hippopotamus teeth, cinnamon, and slaves were exported from East Africa.

By 1800, slaves had become the chief cargo out of East Africa, with Zanzibar as the center; however, with European intrusion into the waters of the Indian Ocean, eventually the British more or less successfully stopped the slave trade, which was in large part carried on by the Omanis. It has been estimated that by 1873 there were thirty thousand slaves ex-

4: Bowen C-5 (1950) 1951 MK2 Maritime Arabs MK2

forbidding traffic in adult women;[26] in 1948 these same two countries failed to file reports on efforts to suppress traffic in women, children, and obscene publications.[27]

Slaving is difficult to stamp out, as the African victims are led to believe that their social status will be bettered. Actually, there is some truth in this, for an African, even as a slave, has a far better life in Arabia, since the Arabs treat their slaves fairly.

British regulations at Zanzibar provide that dhows must carry crew members voluntarily signed on and not in excess of that needed to sail the ship.[28] At Mombasa, *British Regulations for Native Vessels* provides that no man may be signed on as a seaman without satisfying the officials that he has voluntarily shipped, and further that no passengers are to be shipped without the knowledge of the authorities.[29] However, Villiers[30] relates that an Omani *sambuk* intentionally ran down a fishing canoe off Africa and 'saved' two Africans to be sold later as slaves in Arabia.

In essentially the same category as the slave is any other illegal or illicit trade. During World War I gun-running was at a high, but now the trade is not very prosperous. There is considerable cargo smuggled to avoid duties; tea and other goods are run to Persia by the Arabs on the Trucial Coast of Oman—the old Pirate Coast.

The customs and immigration officials in Africa do not have much use for the Arab deepwaterman, with his Arab passengers and smuggling crew. On the other hand, the Arab takes delight in deception, and attempts to confuse the European as much as possible. No large dhow ever carries a visible name; its papers usually contain an official name, but more often the dhow is known by the name of the *nakhoda*, who is usually the nominal owner.

As soon as an Arab dhow reaches an African port, the local officials try to get a passenger and crew list; in this they never succeed, as certain of the passengers always vanish into the native anchorage as soon as the anchor is down, to return after the survey is made. This is easy, as all the native craft are herded into a separated anchorage and often new arrivals have to drive into small spaces in the middle of the anchorage.

Few carry passports or other identification, so actual identification is

[26] J. L. Carver, 'Slavery's Last Stronghold,' *United Nations World*, II, No. 5 (June, 1948), 24-27.

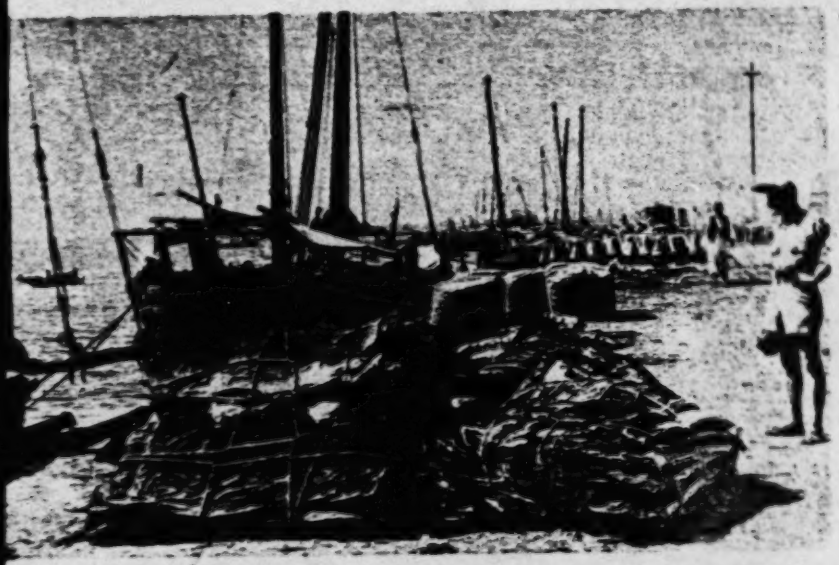
[27] However, in all fairness it should be pointed out that the USSR, Afghanistan, Byelorussia, Honduras, Iceland, and Norway also failed to make reports on the grounds that the problem has not arisen in their countries.

[28] A. Villiers, *SS*, p. 112.

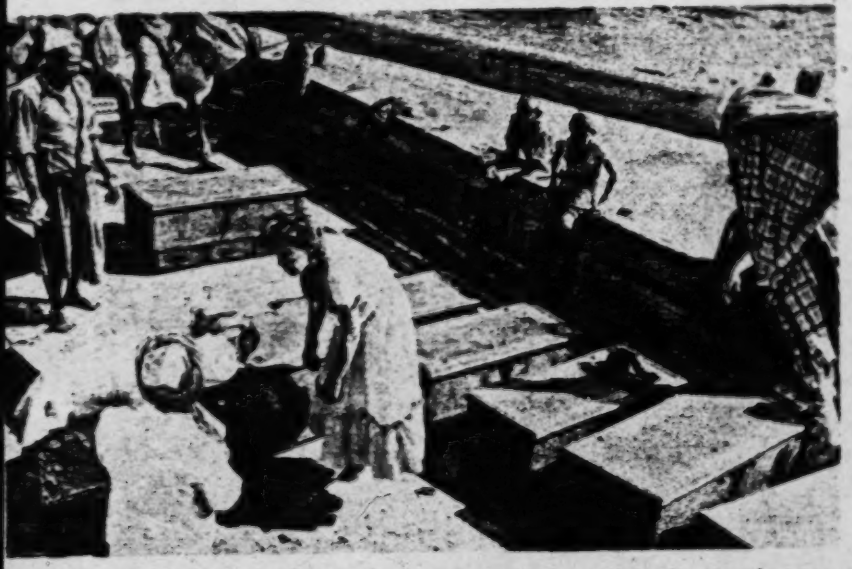
[29] Ibid., p. 190.

[30] Ibid.

439



Manama wharf on Bahrein Island, through which comes the entrepôt trade destined mostly for transshipment to Arabia. Shown in the foreground are hides, and in the background bales of cotton and earthenware water jugs



Persian carpets and brass-bound chests are usually carried by the captain as a private venture. Here a Persian captain is attempting to sell some chests to an English woman in Aden

[facing p. 190A]

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Maritime Arabs NK2

trade, the profits of a sailing boat have diminished and the percentage of the population that supports itself this way is very small.

However, since all the food and clothing of the community must be imported, and in places even the water and building material, trade in the Persian Gulf reaches large proportions. Rice is imported by hundreds of thousands of sacks each year. A special steamer of the Standard Oil Company brings kerosene oil from New York. There is a large importation of the stronger and cheaper grades of foreign cloth. The rice and kerosene and the various imports from India, such as dishes and lanterns and all sorts of gaudy trinkets, are brought in steamers. The British India Steamship Company has a line of coasting steamers which call every week at the larger Gulf ports. Some food materials are brought from Mesopotamia and from Persia, and these smaller importations from near-by ports are often brought in sail boats. All of these imports are paid for indirectly with pearls. The last season before the Great War the value of the pearls marketed in Bahrein was estimated at three *crores* or about $9,000,000.

There are no merchants in the whole peninsula that are so rich as the pearl merchants of the East Coast. There are a few of these merchants that could rank as millionaires if their fortunes were measured in American money. These men are more or less educated and have traveled extensively. Many of them take newspapers and read modern books. Their establishments are places of great luxury and comfort, with many of the outward signs of modern civilization. Their houses and offices may be lit by electric lights, and their taste extends even to motor launches and automobiles. The larger ports of

5: Harrison D-4 (1912-1924) 1924 M1 Middle East
Maritime Arabs Mkg

The larger ports of Kuwait, Bahrein and Dibai have also a large community of artisans and lesser merchants. These serve not simply the local diving population, but also act as manufacturers and wholesalers for the whole of Central Arabia. Practically the entire import and export trade for the interior of the peninsula goes through these three towns, and the merchant and artisan communities are large and prosperous.

It is difficult to be optimistic about the general situation in these pearl-diving communities. The actual material condition of the divers is bad enough, but worse by far is the discouragement and despair that have settled down upon the whole community. No one tries very hard to get out of debt, for he knows that barring some unforeseen miracle, he cannot do so no matter how long and hard he works and how economically he lives. There is little thrift; a stranger is often shocked by the waste that divers show in their personal and household expenditures. There is not the slightest effort, for instance, to discover what sort of clothing will give the most service for the money invested. Expensive or cheap, economical or wasteful, it is all the same. With luck when the present supply of money is gone, the captain will make another liberal allowance, and nothing better than that can be hoped for, no matter what economy and thrift are practised.

The conditions outlined above are those that obtain in the northern towns, chiefly in Bahrein. There is a second large diving community in the region known as the Pirate Coast, whose capital and largest city is Dibai. Its piratical character is a matter of history now long past, but it still makes a good deal of trouble for the British who police the Gulf and maintain order along the coast.